

We are in the middle of our considerations of Zarathustra. In order to better understand the decisive difference between the Asiatic concept of free mind and the Western concept of free mind we must understand the break that occurs between the fundamental thinking of Zarathustra and the thinking of Buddha and Lao-tze. We do not know how much and how far Zarathustra had been influenced by Hebrew thinking. His thinking is in many parts similar to Abraham's but it is also very different in one decisive point: namely, in the concept of the freedom of man, and the break that Zarathustra makes with Asiatic thinking is even more decisive than Abraham will make. This break is mainly contained in the concept of divinity which is distinguished from the Asiatic concept of divinity. We have seen that, philosophically speaking, we do not decide but are neutral towards the question as to whether God makes man or man makes God. We leave the decision of this question to belief, faith, or theology, since we in philosophy are only equipped with the means of human reason, and we are bound to the use of those means, hence we are certainly not able to decide this question.

Knowing this, we can nevertheless say that although we are not able to decide whether God makes man or man makes God we have seen up to know that the two processes are always related. Looked at from the philosophical side, this means that as soon as a fundamentally new concept of man is developed (that is when man takes a new view of his own position and being in the world) – then also, a new concept of divinity comes into the world. They are always related, it is a mirror phenomenon,

although we still do not know which of the two poles is the original and which is the mirror. We cannot decide that. We can only say that both phenomena are intimately related so as soon as a new concept of divinity comes into the world (whether it be a mythical, metaphysical, or free philosophical one), then we can conclude that bound to it is a new concept of man, and that as soon as a new concept of man is conceived then there will be a new concept of divinity that corresponds exactly to it. Philosophically, it gives us one more means to consider the profundity of the concept of man, because in philosophy a concept of God can teach us nothing more than how profound the concept of man is. There we must stop our inquiry, because all other conclusions would go beyond human reason and cannot be used by us.

With the mythological concepts of divinity, we have considered, Hindu, and Chinese, we have seen that they have a strange thing in common, and this might be the reason why neither Lao-tze or Buddha speak about divinity at all. It has been thought that Buddha was an atheist, which he certainly was not, however the concept of divinity which would correspond to Buddha's conception of man as a free thinking being could only have been Zarathustra's, yet he did not have this concept. Neither did Lao-tze. Both refrained from answering this question. Gods or divinities in the old mythological sense were accepted by Buddha in order to overcome them through the power of the mind of man which he put above those divinities. When a demon said to him that he should become one of the highest gods Buddha answered ›I am not concerned with that, because I am about to make the gods and the heavens tremble by becoming a Buddha.‹ (A Buddha means an enlightened one – an enlightened human being). To become an enlightened human being was considered, by him, to be an action that would make all of the heavens shake and all of the

gods tremble. That is the reason why he was considered to be an atheist. We can see in all of his discourses that he left the question open which shows what a critical philosophical mind is at work here. It was the same with Lao-tze. He too left the question open. Neither talked about a definite concept of divinity; they refrained from it and they must have done so consciously.

Now Zarathustra does not do so, because those barest thoughts that we will consider from the original [Gathas](#) must be the thoughts of one definite thinker, and we cannot help but take Zarathustra's concept of God or divinity and consider it within the context of these thoughts, because they must be his. But why did he, being not the founder of a religion as neither Buddha nor Lao-tze were, nevertheless develop a concept of God?

In the eighteenth century when [Immanuel Kant](#) brought all of the propositions that human reason had developed thus far about itself to their final critical conclusions, he made the strange and not yet understood discovery that if we start to reason critically (that means always in self-criticism of reason) though we cannot explain everything out of metaphysical propositions like feeling or God, nevertheless if we reject these limits of human reason entirely (if we reject this 'beyond' of human reason) and take it out of our mind then we lose the very functioning of our reason. Why? Because it means to give up the self-criticism of our reason. As soon as we say, as modern positivists like [Hans Reichenbach](#) say, that we must stop asking unanswerable questions then we lose the capability of raising answerable questions, let alone answering those that can be answered. Unanswerable questions have a relation to all answerable questions and the reason is simple, because as soon as we stop asking such questions we lose the limits of our reason, and as soon as we lose awareness of the limits of human reason

then human reason gets to be crazy. It thinks it can really answer everything. It thinks it is a value in itself and we enter an age of boundless rationalism—rationalism, not as a religion but as a superstition, a cult, or a ritual like any other. It only means that the concept of ›admiration‹ is mistaken for a religious concept. I wouldn't say this is a religious concept just as I wouldn't say that Communism and Nazism are religions. I would say that religions are only lines of human thought that include divinity, however this is a matter of definition. But certainly, they are cults. They are cults, rituals and superstitions exactly what religions are to a certain degree. But they are only that, and rationalism as an ›ism‹ is as boundless a cult and superstition of the human mind as is any other ideology or ›ism‹. To forget the limits of human reason by not asking unanswerable questions means to go beyond the limits of human reason and to go beyond it uncritically in a mad way. This is not exactly what Kant said but it is certainly what he found. He brought us exactly up to this limit of human reason and he wanted us to understand that we should keep it in mind.

Then, he tried to fortify that knowledge by saying there is another reason in us—practical reason, which we always should follow and he tried to give us not a moral law, but rather the moral law, the categorical imperative. Unfortunately, this was a blunder, because already Nietzsche could easily destroy this proposition showing it to be a metaphysical proposition, and with that we became lost in this stream of boundless rationality which on the other hand brought forth at once irrationality. Both have nothing to do with reason. There are (so-called) irrational acts of human beings which are most reasonable, and there are highly rational acts of human beings which are most

unreasonable. We got into a wrong cut of those propositions because it is a scientific cut. We lost entirely our view of the original (creative) functioning of human reason, but if we had considered this borderline we might have preserved it, and we have to try to go back to it.

Now, the miracle comes. There has been a thinker, Zarathustra, who at least five or six hundred years before Christ faced the same situation of reason in the world that Kant faced in the eighteenth century. He was aware of the fact that when the human mind breaks the framework of myth and goes on in free thinking, then this free thinking can only bear fruit if it knows its own boundaries. He set those boundaries very simply namely, by asserting that divinity exists and by giving a concept of God that would make man aware of the existence of something beyond human reason; but he was very careful to make this concept the most philosophical concept of God we have ever seen. He calls his God [Ahura-Mazda](#). Ahura-Mazda does not even mean God. It means literally 'The Well Thinking One'. The One (whatever that is), that is well-thinking. There is no other attribute, no enlargement of his powers, nothing but this bare abstract concept. Now we must disregard all that has been made of Zarathustra's original teachings – that means the whole Persian religion, which has become one of the most involved and mixed up religions in the near Orient. Zarathustra wanted only this one God. If he had lived earlier than (the historical) Abraham, and Abraham himself had been merely an invention of the Jewish prophetic writers during the time of the prophets, then even if the original Zarathustra lived around eight or nine-hundred B.C. that only means that the idea of one transcendent God was actually a Persian idea. However, we cannot make this assumption, because we have no historical material to rely on. We can only try to distinguish between them. But at least one thing

is sure: the idea of Zarathustra's is the more abstract one. He does not give Him all of the names that the Hebrews gave to the God of Abraham. He does not try to show us that he knows anything about the qualities of God except this one quality: ›The Good Thinking One‹.

He makes one more explanation about this Being. He conceives of a Being out of being or above being, and that means philosophically at least, that he makes the first decisive distinction between the Creator and creation. The creation is Being; the Creator is a being. We cannot give Him another name. We cannot say it is a ›nothing‹ that is above Being, because it could not create Being. This God-Creator of Zarathustra's is so unlike the other God-Creators (the Hindu or Egyptian gods for instance) who are so poor in imagination that one is often appalled at how dry they seemingly are. That is, we can never know if they hadn't created the world out of their own bodies (their own being), because they are so mixed up with their own creation. There is not a trace of (distinguishable) cosmological speculation in them. They are as mixed up in their own creation as those inventors of purely scientific world pictures were after the Renaissance. [Spinoza](#) for instance, couldn't help but draw exactly the same conclusions as those drawn by Indian mythological thinking: namely, to identify the Creator and creation whom for Spinoza were One. There is a very strange resemblance between modern naturalistic thinking (founded so to speak by Spinoza) and the oldest mythological thinking as founded by the Indians. The secret is that both are concepts of energy. They are energetic world pictures. The development of energy in modern science has brought us back to this metaphysical superstition of a God that is mixed up with his own creation. Zarathustra's God is not. He is a God whom the Christians will later call the Creator, and who created the world out of nothingness. He didn't need anything to create Being, that is a pure definition of the Creator.

We meet this first in Zarathustra. He says ›Ahura-Mazda is apart from everything else.‹ He is apart from Being, and there is no possible relation. This distinguishes him from the Hebrew conception and it is also what makes the concept of divinity in Zarathustra so abstract. Abstract, not only in thinking, but abstract in ritual and in performance. We see this most clearly in those little ›cults‹ (if one can call them cults at all) that Zarathustra founded, the circle of contemplative thinkers (almost like the Quakers), however these little circles had no rituals. Their only activity was thinking in common – in community; nothing else. When later sacrifices came to be made and the sun (the light) became an object of worship they departed from Zarathustra's meaning. Zarathustra meant by ›light‹ not the sun, but rather the light of thought. Thinking is the light for him. He does not distinguish body, mind, and spirit in our way. When he says ›the body of Ahura-Mazda is light, the spirit of Ahura-Mazda is thought‹ he means only that Ahura-Mazda is nothing other than this pure activity of thinking. Nothing else. The idea of fire (light) was later taken by [Heraclitus](#) in a different way and we shall see, when we come to him, how he takes this idea and transforms it into a purely western thought.

Here in Persian thought it means exactly what the light meant to Buddha: namely, the enlightening element. Light is only a symbol. The symbol of free thinking and free reasoning. That is why in Zarathustra the main prayer, which in these original cults was repeated again and again was, as I said the last time ›Ahura-Mazda we thank thee who has given us a free will and a discriminating mind.‹ This ›being-apart‹ of God makes it possible for Zarathustra to speak of creation as a ›term‹. He calls ›Being‹ the creation. This is the first time in philosophical thought that we have a concept which absolutely distinguishes Being from the Creator, and in which there seems to be no way, no personal way, to

communicate with this Creator, except in a relationship of pure thought. In Abraham, a personal relationship with God is still possible. In Zarathustra, the Creator cannot be reached, but if we think of Him then we can be certain that our thinking will be directed in the right way. We will never reach Him by our thinking but that gives us an aim, and this aim brings us into the right way of thinking. That is the reason for those common circles of contemplative thinkers, for as they direct each other they are directed toward the idea of Ahura-Mazda. One can almost say that here, in an original religious sense, is the only instance in all human development where a performance—namely, sitting in this circle and thinking things out, was taken as a religious performance, but was really a straight reasonable philosophic performance and nothing else. It is almost a philosophical religion – something that seems to be a paradox, but nevertheless, it must have been reached then, because no other indication is given as to a reason for the performance. The idea of a God absolutely apart from creation takes this immense idea of the Absolute out of creation. We do not know what this idea is, because we haven't thought enough about what the number ›one‹ is. What is ›one‹? Where do we get this concept from? We don't know, but (this much is certain) the Absolute is an idea which we need, because if we did not have it we could not relate. We could not have the concept of relation, and therefore the concept of the ›relative‹ either. This idea of the Absolute might only be a working hypothesis, but it is certainly the best working hypothesis the human mind has ever made, because we use it all of the time without knowing it. We use it whenever we establish relations and man is an establisher of relations. That is one of his main creative capabilities.

Now Zarathustra seemed to have been aware of this and like Kant later he seemed to have been aware of another thing – that if we lose the idea of an Absolute and make our relations in such a way as they are not directed towards this idea of an Absolute, then we lose the best capabilities of our reasoning. This seems to be a merely logical fact, but it is existential and can be shown to be existential. We see, for instance, in all clinical cases in modern psychopathology, that as soon as the capacity to establish relations has been lost within a given mentality, then the Absolute has been lost in that mentality. It is the same thing in the case of another polarity; cases like those in the First World War – clinical cases – such as the brain injury of a man who seemed to be absolutely normal but who could not do one thing. If one was sitting with him, and the sun was shining outside and one asked him »Say the sun is shining outside« he would say »It is raining outside.« He was unable to make the switch from a true statement to a false statement. That was his brain injury. Other brain injuries showed that relations could not be made as soon as the Absolute wasn't there.

On the other hand, we have also seen that as soon as the Absolute rules relations absolutely, then all touch with the world and with reality is gone so that only the idea of the Absolute remains, and then relations are developed out of the Absolute towards the world rather than from the world towards the Absolute, resulting in the absolute loss of contact with reality and insanity – the full capability of developing relations out of an *idée fixe*. This *idée fixe* is unmovable and is, mentally speaking, nothing but a mirror reflection of this idea of an Absolute. The insane person has no ideas. He is incapable of having ideas. This *idée fixe* is his substitute for the idea of an Absolute and it rules him and it rules all of his thinking, so exactly, so to speak, does this mechanism

which governs the real relationship between our idea of an Absolute and the relative work.

To have then the concept of divinity that the Hindus have had, that all myth has had, that we in the West had again with Spinoza, and that most of us have without knowing it, means to mix up the concept of God with creation, to make an actual infinity out of relative phenomena, which is exactly what the creation is if we truly look at it. We do not even know that the creation is One – we haven't the slightest idea that it is. It is a mere speculation of ours and we cannot even prove that the creation is thoroughly related. What really comes before us as true relations, meaningful relations in the world, are relations that we have established ourselves. Of all other relations we know nothing as soon as we haven't established them. So the metaphysical idea that the creation is a whole, a ›One‹, that it is thoroughly related, one thing to another, and that this whole is an Absolute, means really to mistake an infinite mass of phenomena and their relations for the Absolute, and every mixing up of this kind makes man lose his freedom, because then he becomes merely one function in an infinite bundle of relations which he cannot overlook and yet which he doesn't even know.

That was the tragedy of all mythical thinking, and it is ours too, because we are only modern mythologists without even knowing it. I mean the believers in those modern ideologies like naturalism – if it is called naturalism or supernaturalism, idealism or materialism, it is all the same thing, the same medal from the other side. Only Kant's operation and Socrates operation and basically Zarathustra's operation – namely, to say we do not know and cannot know the Absolute – that the Absolute is something completely separate from the world of the relative – only this can keep us on the right track of a development of straight and fruitful reasoning. We will see later that Heraclitus took this position up. We

don't know whether he got it from Zarathustra or not, but this position was not taken up by the whole Greek world with the exception of Heraclitus and later Socrates. All other Greek thinking has nothing whatsoever to do with this proposition of the absolute separation of what we here call God and creation.

Making man aware of this absolute separation also means another thing. It means to take God out of the realm of power. Power, in our sense, is not might. Let us not call that power, because we are after the sources of human power, and we mean by it something other than what is meant today. In order to distinguish it from force and violence let us go back to the two kinds of power I mentioned before – namely, performing power and creative power. Performing power is not really power. It is energy. Real power is something absolutely different. It is that which can direct energy – quite a different quality. Power then, in this sense can only be the possession of the One transcendental God who does not need to do anything but direct energy by thinking, and thinking taken here, is not itself energy (as it is taken, for instance, by the Hindus as the highest spiritual energy). Even in Christian thinking it is sometimes taken for energy, let alone in modern western thinking. Thinking does not know what thinking is. It only knows that it is and that it can direct. As soon as we try by thinking to define thinking as a certain material or natural quality we have already fallen back into the concept of energy, and as soon as we think in terms of energy we are back into a world in which Creator and creation are mixed up with one another, that is, we are back into a merely scientific scheme. We do not transcend any more, and that means that we lose the highest capability of thinking by thinking wrongly about thinking. That sounds so complicated but it is all really very simple. It only means what all free philosophers have meant, the few who have existed in the whole development of the world, and that is that philosophy starts with one thing – namely, never to pretend to know anything that

you do not really know. And of thinking and reasoning and the human being, the human person we can only say that we know that it exists. We can also say and find out to a certain extent how it exists, but we certainly do not know what it is. We cannot answer the question as to its essence. What it is we do not know and so we should not pretend to know, because if we could know what it is then we would have the truth, and then we would have lost freedom already. It would mean that then we could direct thinking, we would be gods so to speak, and we are not gods. We cannot know what it is we have here. We only know that we have it, that it is ›here‹, the ›das‹, the ›that‹ which modern [Existentialists](#) call existence. I do not call it existence, because I think that existence is just the what, but this is a matter of terminology and we won't go into it here. Their proposition is, in the end, a mere psychological one. It is not a real ontological proposition and that is what we are talking about here.

So, Zarathustra's concept of God is the most pure way of saying something about an unknown absolute factor which is always in the awareness of the human mind as being possible – yes, being highly probable – but it is not known and it is not knowable by the human mind. It can only be described in negative terms. If human reason attempts to describe this phenomenon of which it is aware that it might exist then it can do no more than to describe it in a philosophically negative way – the Absolute separate One, the well or good-thinking One – and then finish. No more. Communication with it is possible only in thinking, because it gives the awareness of thinking itself. In this sense Zarathustra develops the first concept of a transcendent God-Creator whom we do not know and whom we will never know, but of whom we will always be aware as soon as we follow our human reasoning purely to its limits. Here, in this Zarathustrian thinking, as well as later in Kant's thinking, a discovery is made which for us is most important in our course – namely,

a way is shown which was dimly perceived by [Pascal](#) when he said ›All knowledge leads away from God; real knowledge, the best knowledge, leads back to God.‹ That means not to an understanding of God or to a knowledge of God, or to a foundation of any religion or any concept of God, but rather to go to the limits of human reason, to really try out nihilism in all of its consequences and then go through it, because nihilism is one of the bitterest consequences of human reason, and when you have done this you will be exactly at this borderline of reason and faith.

So, this relation, this funny relation, that man can never conceive of a real position for himself in the world, can never learn anything basically new about himself without having created, at the same time, a new concept of divinity, has a certain profundity to it, because both factors are permanently related to one another in human thinking and in human experience. This concept of the transcendent God is really, if we want to be critical of it, also a picture of God. Later the Hebrews, and especially Abraham, will tell us that we shouldn't make a picture of God, although they also made one. They hadn't yet refrained from it. But this Zarathustrain concept is also a picture. It is a symbol. God is, conceived, though Zarathustra says we can never know anything about Him. Nevertheless He is conceived as an absolute mind, and a mind is something. We have a mind too, and our own mind becomes the absolute mirror reflection into the unknown of the concept that we make for ourselves of God. It is the most abstract and the most pure concept of God ever made, and the most sober one, yet it is still a concept of God and not merely a factor that we could call divinity or the Absolute. It is, as I mentioned before, also a symbol, but the most philosophical symbol ever to be invented and used in speculations like these. It enabled Zarathustra to attain this knowledge that lies at the borderline of human reason, enabled him to find out a

few things about the human mind that had not been seen up to his time, and that have since been entirely forgotten.

When Nietzsche chose Zarathustra as the hero of his main work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he did a very remarkable thing. He was perhaps the first modern philosopher to become aware of the strange fundamental significance of pre-Platonic thinking, who already, as a young man in his early twenties, tried to give his students at Basel a picture of the significance of the pre-Platonic philosophers, and who was able to interpret the only saying that we have left from *Thales* – 'Everything is made of water' – in such a way that it later became the foundation of all modern Western philosophy. He showed how this one sentence could never have been possible before Thales, and why. He was truly concerned with those figures and he was the first to be concerned with them. For his whole life through he both hated Socrates and loved him – it was an ambiguous affair all of the time, an ambivalence, and he had to write about him again and again and again. Another man he hated (and he took him for a man as we do in this course) was Jesus of Nazareth, whom he wanted to destroy, because he thought he was one of the originators of all the evils in our time because of his moral concepts. Nevertheless, he was so fascinated by him that he always turned back to him. He said 'He was so young, this Hebrew, when they crucified him, and he was so noble. If he had only grown older like me and had really seen the world he would have taken back everything that he said. He was noble enough for it.'¹

The third man he was concerned with was Zarathustra. He knew little about Zarathustra, because at that time he did not have any of the critical apparatus necessary to go deeply into the *Zend-Avesta* texts, let alone to find the few rocks that are lying at the bottom, and which we analyze today. So, he made a big mistake about Zarathustra, and that means he made the same mistake that everybody has made about him, and that is still made today – namely, to believe that Zarathustra was the inventor of good and

¹ »Believe me, my brethren! He died too early; he himself would have disavowed his doctrine had he reached my age! Noble enough was he to disavow!« Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883–85, I, § 21.

evil. That he was the man who brought into the world the distinction between good and evil, and this does not mean that in Indian or mythological thinking people did not talk about this thing being good, or that thing being evil. Rather it means good and evil as absolute criteria of human life, as absolutes, and Nietzsche used his Zarathustra in order to show how bad it is for the world to take morality, to take good and evil, as absolutes that become the judges of human life. That human life is destroyed by this moralism, and that we have to attain a position beyond good and evil. In this wanting to go beyond good and evil, he thought he could do best by taking the figure of Zarathustra whom he loved, because of his sayings, and whom he made contradict himself. He made Zarathustra the Jesus who repented, who really could say now, after having learned better about the world, the opposite of what he formerly had said. That was his reason for taking Zarathustra. The most remarkable thing about it is that he was deeply mistaken. If he could have read Zarathustra's original statements about good and evil he would have had to realize that Zarathustra's thinking was far beyond his own. That Zarathustra really had discovered the right relation of human reason to what was later called good and evil, and that he developed them not as absolutes but as the relative human creative capacities, almost already in the Socratic sense, which Nietzsche hadn't understood either, because he didn't want to. He had other purposes in mind.

The second reason he had to take Zarathustra was that Zarathustra was considered to be not only the man who brought the dogma of good and evil as absolutes into the world, but that he was also the first to make a decisive distinction between body and spirit – A dualist – the first great dualist, and Nietzsche hated dualism, because he had found after a long experience of Christianity that as soon as we introduce the concept of

sin into the world, and then, by making the distinction between body and spirit identify sin with the body and spirit with the good, that then we are decidedly lost. He was right there, but once again he was wrong as far as Zarathustra goes. Zarathustra never made such a distinction. Rather he was like all of the other thinkers we are considering here and that includes Jesus of Nazareth (although it is a case that is hard to make but nevertheless it can be made). They did not accept the distinction between body and soul, or between body and spirit. When they talked about the soul they meant the human person. They didn't mean any spiritual energy which inhabits as a divine element the dirty body of man. They did not think that the body of man or the body of nature was dirty, and they did not think that nature (or the body) was the house of sin or evil. They thought that man's person is the creator of good and evil, not the house. We will look into Zarathustra's so-called theory of good and evil, but first there is a third point in which Nietzsche showed his splendid instinct for taking the figure of Zarathustra, because he identified with him without knowing it, in one decisive respect. Nietzsche as Heidegger has said, and rightly so, concluded the whole metaphysical development of the West by finding, as the central concept of Western metaphysical thinking, the concept of the ›will‹. Nietzsche's last work, *The Will To Power*, tries to show that the will to power, in its naked form, rules and governs all of humanity, and that this is by no means an accident. That all of the cosmos, the ›whole‹ in all of its parts, is nothing but this will to power, and that man is nothing but the highest development of the will to power. This is a merely energetic concept, and it is set against the concept of Hegel, that other great metaphysician of the nineteenth century, who believed that everything is spirit, that the ›All‹ is only the different transformations, the ›becoming‹ of spirit. Nietzsche put against this the will, and this ›will‹ is a modern scientific

concept that is very low indeed. He ran into biology, into all of those modern scientific factors, and he became distracted from his main purpose, nevertheless the concept of the will itself is absolutely decisive. When Nietzsche took it up it was in order to show that man has no free will, that all will is blind, and that it is blind because it is only the will to power, to mere energy. It is simply the will to have more energy, and that means to have more effect, to have more of what I would call performing power, power over others, power over things, and so he creates a theory of violence without having wanted to do so.

He tried to overcome that theory of violence by a marvelous trick. The trick is that he, being a Christian (and Nietzsche was very much a Christian) re-introduced the concept of self-overcoming. Now, he believed, the will of man could stand against this cosmic will, could overcome it and purify it by this act of self-overcoming, with the consequence that Nietzsche fell back into what he really wanted to destroy – namely, Christian morals. But the decisive point he envisaged was that there might be in the will an element that gives us a lead toward creative power, that there might be a lead in the concept of will that would bring us into a deeper insight into human creative capabilities, and creative powers for him were only artistic powers, because he couldn't see any others in the nineteenth century. The businessmen had stopped being creative, let alone the politicians, and so only the artists could be considered to be creative and perhaps the scientists, though he chose the artists.

So that was what Nietzsche rediscovered, and this was the original discovery of Zarathustra. Zarathustra's concept of will however, is quite different. He is talking about ›free will‹. ›We thank these for having given us a free will and a discriminating mind.‹ What is this free will? In order to find out we must first destroy the superstition

that has been built around Zarathustra – namely, that he was a dualist who created two gods, Ahura-Mazda and [Ahriman](#). The later Persian gods are two and the creation has been done by both. One is God, the other is the devil. In the later religion there is a bad God and a good God and men have the task of choosing between them – either to join the army of the good God, or to join the army of the devil, and whoever comes to govern the world will be decided in this battle. All of this emerges in later Persian thinking. Later, the gnostics, in [Hellenistic times](#), will refortify this idea, and also the [Manichaeans](#) who will take over this theory of the two spirits, one good and one evil, which try to rule the world with man in-between, torn apart by them. So, Zarathustra was credited with being the inventor of the devil and the inventor of hell. (He did no such thing). What he really did do was to discover, quite clearly and philosophically, the demonic element in man. He did not say there are two gods. There is only one God, Ahura-Mazda, but the world, the creation, is ruled by two spirits. By spirits he does not mean demons in the Indian sense. These spirits (of which he speaks) are not mythological figures. They are not in the world. They are spirits only in the sense that is meant when we speak of the ›spirit‹ of the American Constitution, that is, they are institutional. In that sense they are leading ideas. Man has two possible leading ideas within him and these leading ideas can rule the world. The one is the idea of the ›better‹ and the other is the idea of the ›bad‹. This is a very funny distinction. He is not talking about good or evil. He does not talk about the good, but rather, about the better, and he does not talk about evil. He talks about the bad. Why on the one side the comparative and on the other side the noun? Why?

The good sounds like an Absolute – the better is a relative. The statement is strange at first sight. We will fully understand it when we see what Socrates did with the same idea, because he developed it to the

full understanding of human reason. Here we have to see first why they are not absolutes. The later Zarathustrian religion is full of demons, and demons not in Zarathustra's sense as spirits, as leading ideas, but spirits really as ghosts of all kinds, hundreds and thousands of them. Nevertheless, Zarathustra is responsible for this misunderstanding. He was also thinking about an infinite array of demons, but demons created by man. He talked about the better and the bad and made a distinction we have come to understand in modern psychology – namely, the automatism that sets in as soon as man engages in any wrong action with the wrong intentions. The bad is infectious. If I do a bad thing to you, a really mean thing, then you must be very strong and conscious of yourself not to take revenge upon someone else. That would mean to get infected with a bad action and just let it go on. It is just the opposite with a good action. That is why there is no good action or 'Good' but only the better. We do the better and it is not infectious. The other one who also wants to do the better will have to do it out of his own power and make a decision for it. It is not infectious except in certain cases of love, where it is not really an infection but rather the interchange of goodness.

That is what Zarathustra meant by producing demons. Men, in doing bad actions with intentions towards the bad, set spirits into the world which possess other men, and so the bad spreads continuously and can be hemmed in only by the free decision of every single man to do actions for the better – all of this is the eternal struggle, and the struggle goes on only in man himself and nowhere else. Man has the possibility to be a demon. More than that, he is a creator of demons – that is his bad capability. Here we have an entirely new concept, a concept comparable to that of Lao-tze and Buddha. It is a concept of free human reason. They conceive of the human person as being free within the world. They show a position that man can take, that he has a certain task in the world, but that he has no task with the world. Zarathustra's, on the other hand, is

a concept of a task that man has with the world, and it is the greatest of all that have ever been made. The Christian concept is nothing compared to it. The Hebrew conception is nearer to Zarathustra's but Zarathustra's is the purest of them all, and here comes the great misunderstood myth of Zarathustra. It is not really a myth. It is as little a myth as his idea of God is a religious idea. It is rather a clear philosophical concept. This concept has never really been considered in all Western philosophy, and I think this is quite in order, because to consider it almost requires our present-day knowledge of human power over nature which Zarathustra by no means could have had. What did he know of human power over nature and what do we know about it? We know that we can almost destroy all of the basic propositions of nature, so great is our performing power.

Zarathustra envisaged a task of man with the world and ›world‹ means here the creation. As soon as he had thrown God out of creation so to speak, and made him the Creator he made man free thanking Ahura-Mazda for creating man with a free will and a discriminating mind. And then he took the next step – namely, to say that if this is so, that man is free, then the creation cannot be thoroughly determined, because if it were and man were only in creation, then man himself would be determined and there could not be any freedom. This could not be a cosmos.

So this is a working proposition for man – this idea of ›the world.‹ When I first took this idea up, before I even heard of Zarathustra, man was beginning to claim that for the first time he could not prove that the world is a cosmos, and we can see in the natural view of today that we can only handle an infinite mass of more or less related phenomena, but that this is not a world in the human sense. What we mean here by ›world,‹ or the creation, is only a possibility for a world. It means that God has

created a creator of a world, and a creation which this creator can handle in order to make it a world. Zarathustra was the first to conceive of this idea. The idea of man, not as a conqueror, thought he came from a conquering people, but rather the absolute responsibility of man for Being – not only for himself, but for Being. He approached this with the idea that man is a producer, a creator of demons. That means that man can make the world intolerable, and by god we have learned in our century that man can make the world intolerable by creating those demons of whom Zarathustra spoke. But man can also bring the world into a cosmic order and that means to make things move the right way, the better way by his free thinking and decision if he is only ready to take over the responsibility. All of this is contained in one myth of the Gathas.

After Ahura-Mazda had created the world, the soul of creation, and by soul he meant only the ›voice‹ of creation spoke to Ahura-Mazda. The voice asked ›Who will be my master?‹ And Ahura-Mazda answered ›Zarathustra‹. That means man. And the soul, the voice of creation said ›How can you do that to me? I was expecting a real master who can truly put me into order, who can truly be my master, a strong being, a being who can really rule the world, and here you give me such a fragile thing that dies every minute.‹ And Ahura-Mazda said ›Be silent. It is the best thing to do. He will be the only one who can take care of you.‹

To take care of the creation of God as man's task in the world – to take care – this idea had come to me quite independently of Zarathustra: and I tried to develop it and then forgot it. Then I made another astonishing discovery – namely, that another philosopher of our time, Martin Heidegger at [Freiburg](#), who also had been shocked by this tremendous event was starting to think along the same lines. To ask the question ›Is there any capability in man to take care of the world?‹ And after that I went on to discover that neither of us were so original as we might have believed, because Zarathustra had already developed exactly the same idea in 500 B.C. Man's task is to take care of creation, and in taking over this responsibility he becomes free. This is the price he has to pay for his possible freedom, because freedom is only this basic possibility.

Man is not born free. Man can only become free. Free will does not mean that man is free. Free will means only that man can become free if he uses his will rightly, for the better, and not for the bad. That is his only way to freedom, to becoming a free person, a free personality, and he can do it only at the price of taking over the responsibility for what God has done with the world, and understanding that God might have created the world to give him this opportunity, and that he should be thankful for it. The great joy of Zarathustra's message (and we have talked about the fact that all of these messages we have been considering are messages of joy) was to discover this great basic possibility of man. It is the center of all of man's creative capabilities and also the center of man's possible freedom, hence, we have both the basic distinction and also the basic unity of his message with that of Asiatic thinking. It is certain that although Zarathustra had not known anything of Buddha or Lao-tze he did the same thing. He tried to break the iron framework of the human mind that was myth, to break out of this iron cage, and to put man on his own feet, on his own ground, through free reason and through the consciousness that each human being can have of himself and his own possibilities. By doing so he could almost have drawn the same conclusions that Buddha and Lao-tze drew. He could have concluded that man has the possibility of isolating himself from Being as Buddha did, by drawing all of Being into himself, into his own mind in order to reach Nirvana (which is only the fullness of human awareness and thinking and living within), or he could have identified man with the great possibility of benevolence as Lao-tze conceived of him, like a gardener of Being, a gardener of other men, of plants, of animals, a benevolent one. But both of these possibilities, of freedom are related only to man himself and not to the world. Zarathustra,

relates man's capability of absolute freedom not only to man but to the world. He says, so to speak, 'The world, the creation, needs man and man's freedom. He is not only the dear child of creation. Rather he is the one who is needed by creation, because, to put it in modern terms, otherwise the creation wouldn't make sense.' Being has no meaning in itself. If this being is to have a higher meaning this higher meaning can only be reached by man. That is Zarathustra's main idea. Man is here to put meaning into being, and that means to create the better, to bring meaning into being by making out of this being a world. This Persian world conqueror coming out of a race of nomads who conquered the greatest empire in the East was really the man who overcame the lust for conquest. That is why we so bitterly need to reconsider his thinking, because all of our development since the Renaissance has been nothing but a lust for the conquest of nature, of nations, of ourselves, of everything, and a lust for power as energy.

Zarathustra knew already that man can be much more than a world conqueror. You conquer only worlds that are there. He can also be a world builder, a builder of worlds, and how he is this and how he can become this was the main concern of Zarathustra's thinking. Ahura-Mazda is outside of creation. Man is exactly within creation, but being within creation he also transcends creation. He is not entirely explained by it. He can transcend creation towards the Absolute and can therefore bring meaning to creation. He is needed by creation, and that is the basic thought that Zarathustra took. It means to take man, not as he is taken by metaphysical philosophy, as a being of which we can say that he has a nature — namely, the nature of man. The nature of man is something that pretends to say that we know what man is, and therefore can give a valid definition of what he is and what his possibilities are. Zarathustra

is the first who explicitly shows that we cannot know what man is, because if there is a transcendent Absolute, even if only as an idea in man's mind, then that means that man is at least a transcendent being. If he loses his capacity for transcendence he loses the center of all his creative capabilities. Therefore, he cannot be defined as a mere 'what', a mere being. He has to be defined skeptically and very cautiously. If we want to define him as a being, then we must define him as a being who can be. It is his own capacity to be, or not. He can be, he can become, and that is the definition of becoming. Man is a becoming being. There is nothing else becoming in the world. There is no other becoming in the world. We can only show there is some other becoming in the world if we believe with the scientists, or with Hegel, that there is a cosmic process which we overlook and out of which comes a meaning. But we don't know any such process. The only thing that we know is that those masses of phenomena are in continuous change. That is all we know. We know of change, but this change is not becoming. Becoming we make within ourselves, because we are becoming beings. We can make ourselves by our life and by our reason and by our will into a continuous and consistent human being, and that we can or cannot lose that chance. By losing that chance we take hold of certain changes in the world, certain processes, and transform them into processes of becoming by giving them certain aims, by forcing certain aims upon them, and then, in an abstract sense, inferring continuous changing lines of occurrences which are again transformed into systems of events. Events and occurrences can be distinguished by the fact that in occurrences we do not know of any meaning or aim, while in events, which we can produce ourselves with the help of occurrences, we turn the occurrences around in a certain direction, and we can know their meaning, because we provide the meaning. Man, in that sense, is not only needed by creation but he needs creation, because if

there were no creation then he could not be what he is – a realizer of ›world‹. To realize ›world,‹ to make out of the elements of phenomena that are given, a meaningful world – this is the real task of man in the world, and the seal of his freedom.

Those are the modern implications of what Zarathustra stood for, and upon looking back it seems almost impossible that a man of his time could have developed thoughts which are so far reaching and for us so entirely new. For the first time we see, if we look deeper into history, a historical phenomenon that has occurred very often not only in human, or philosophical thinking, but also in human actions, concepts, and plans. I think it was [Voltaire](#) who first rejected the idea of a continuous history saying that ›I for my person think that the age of Pericles, though it was so short, is worth more than a thousand years of any other history.‹² So, with the Augustinian age in Rome, and so he thought, with his own age. We are so prejudiced. By making a choice he was the first to break with the age-old European, Jewish-Christian superstition that there must be a sense or a meaning to history. Just because it flows in a certain way there must be a meaning, an over-all meaning, and this was the first breakthrough, to say there must not be. There are many meanings to history and the ones that are most worthwhile may be those that had formerly been defeated a few times. They might carry us further than all of those victorious opinions that have ruled us for two centuries. Don't overrate victory. There might be thoughts and concepts that turn out later to be more profound and to be more useful than all of those which have really lived in reality. Here we can see such an example. We have, and we will consider more such examples. People who have considered the fundamental possibilities of man which the men of their time could not yet make into realities, could not yet develop, because the conditions had not yet been given.

² Probably from: Voltaire: [The Age of Louis XIV](#), 1751.

Today, in the twentieth century, a whole mass of conditions have been given that have never been given before, and to those of us for whom such thoughts do not seem strange it is amazing how they can be so automatically rejected and overlooked, because they seem so crazy within the context of our time. So that is why this especially one fundamental thought of Zarathustra that man is responsible for creation and that this responsibility is a precondition for his freedom, had to be discarded. But it also shows, as Goethe once said:

»Wer kann was Kluges, wer was Dummes denken, das nicht die Vorwelt schon gedacht?«

»Who can think something clever or something stupid that has not already been thought by his forefathers?«³

Here is something clever that has been thought by Zarathustra. It shows us another thing – namely, the craziness of the modern scientific mind that thinks, as [John Dewey](#) once said ›Oh, those are all errors of the past,‹ The superstition of people who, because they have been born into the twentieth century with all of those enlarged opportunities for knowledge, think themselves all to be more clever than Plato. They aren't. Even our best philosophers today cannot be compared with a mind like Plato's, let alone that we all should be more clever.

There is a third thing to learn from it, and that is of the existence of the absolute capacity of reasonable thinking in the human mind, of any age. There is a deep justice to this because we may ask those people who have said ›Poor Plato, having been born in that dark time when humanity knew so little and we, who are so bright, know so much‹ – how did it come about that they did not despair at the idea that they did not live at the end of time, in the fiftieth century. What knowledge people might have them. It would be a deep injustice, wouldn't it, if the profundity of experience and thinking about the essential things of life should increase with the accident of having been born a century later than another fellow?

³ Goethe, J. W.: [Faust. Tragedy Second Part](#), 1832, Act II.

It goes against the basic equality of man. That every human mind is a mind, that every man is a being that can be, that every man has equal value not only before God but also, I hope before every other man. So, all those historical fantasies of progress and of how far we have proceeded, are, from a philosophical point of view, all sheer nonsense. The real question is how profound is our thinking and what can be done with the world. Up to now we have not shown that we can do better with the world than people of former ages. We have only shown we can do worse.